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ABSTRACT

The Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics in 1987-88 and again in 1990-91, provided public school districts with a list of eight specific criteria that might be used in considering applicants for teaching positions. This issue brief looks at the criteria school districts reported requiring to screen t acher applicants. The findings showed: When considering applicants, public school districts required certification and educational credentials more frequently than passage of basic skills or subject knowledge tests in the teacher hiring process. Percentages of public school districts requiring passage of state and national subject knowledge of basic skills tests increased from 1987-88 to 1990-91. Public school districts required state tests of basic skills more frequently than other district, state, and national tests. In 1990-91, public school districts in different regions of the country reported different requirements for teacher candidates. These data show that nontest indicators of teacher quality, such as certification, played a more important role in the teacher hiring process in public school districts than did test indicators. However, while the use of nontest indicators remained fairly constant, the use of test indicators increased. (ND)

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ED 398 201

ISSUE BRIEF

What Criteria Are Used in Considering Teacher Applicants?

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Discussions in recent years have reviewed professional standards for teachers (e.g., Boe and Gilford 1992) and state-directed procedures for teacher licensure (e.g., Wagner 1990). Performance-based assessments for new teachers have also been the subject of much recent interest and development activity; for example, the Educational Testing Service is currently creating new performance-based assessments to replace the National Teachers Examination (e.g., Choy et al. 1993a).

In considering current practices and proposals designed to ensure quality teaching, the criteria used by school districts to consider or screen teacher applicants become important. Data available from the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), permit a review of these criteria and any changes in their use over time. In 1987–88 and again in 1990–91, SASS provided public school districts with a list of eight specific criteria that might be used in considering applicants for teaching positions.* For each item listed, school district respondents were asked to indicate whether it was required of teacher candidates, used in considering applicants but not required, or not used at all in the process of considering applicants. This brief focuses on the criteria public school districts reported *requiring* when considering teacher applicants.

When considering applicants for teaching positions, public school districts required specific nontest indicators of teacher qualifications more frequently than they did passage of specific tests.

In 1987–88 and in 1990–91, public school districts more frequently reported requiring certification and educational credentials than passage of basic-skills or subject-knowledge tests in the teacher hiring process (table 1). In both years, the greatest percentages of these districts required full standard state certification in the field to be taught (approximately 84 percent). Graduation from state-approved programs, emergency or temporary certification, and in-field college degrees in the teaching field were each more frequently required than was the passage of any of the four tests listed.

Percentages of public school districts requiring passage of national and state subject-knowledge or basic-skills tests increased from 1987–88 to 1990–91.

In 1987–88, about 35 percent of public school districts required teacher applicants to have passed a state test of basic skills, but by 1990–91, this percentage increased to approximately 42 percent (table 1). In addition, more public school districts required state tests or the National Teachers Examination (NTE) in 1990–91 than did public school districts in 1987–88. About 24 percent of districts required passage of a state test of subject knowledge in 1987–88, compared to approximately 34 percent in 1990–91. There was little change during these years in the numbers of public school districts requiring passage of district tests of basic skills or subject knowledge.

Table 1. Percentage of public school districts requiring specific nontest indicators and passage of specific tests when screening or considering teacher applicants: 1987–88 and 1990–91

	1987–88	1990–91
Full Standard State Certification for Field to be Taught	82.58	84.12
Graduation from State-Approved Teacher Education Program	70.11	69.81
Emergency or Temporary State Certification	66.61	68.80
College Major/Minor in Field to be Taught	67.20	66.15
Passage of State Test of Basic Skills	34.89	42.32
Passage of State Test of Subject Knowledge	23.54	34.07
Passage of the National Teachers Examination	21.35	29.51
Passage of District Test of Basic Skills or Subject Knowledge	2.62	4.32

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1987–88 and 1990–91 Schools and Staffing Surveys (Public School District Questionnaire).

* In 1987–88, these eight criteria were evaluated by respondents in terms of *screening* teacher applicants; in 1990–91, they were evaluated in terms of their use in *considering* teacher applicants.

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Among the selected tests reported as required in the teacher hiring process, public school districts required state tests of basic skills more frequently than other district, state, and national tests.

In 1990–91, for example, about 42 percent of public school districts required passage of state tests of basic skills, making this type of test the most frequently required in the teacher hiring process (table 1). State tests of subject knowledge also were required more frequently than district tests or the NTE in 1990–91. State subject-knowledge tests were more frequently required than district tests in 1987–88, although state subject-knowledge tests were required about as frequently as the NTE in that year. In both 1987–88 and 1990–91, district tests of basic skills and subject knowledge were the least often required of these four tests.

In 1990–91, public school districts in different regions of the country reported different test requirements for teacher candidates.

In general, districts in the South more frequently required state tests in their teacher hiring processes than did other regions of the country (table 2). For example, about 61 percent of districts in the South required passage of state tests of subject knowledge, whereas about one-quarter of districts in each of the other three regions required these tests. Districts in the South and the West differed distinctly from districts in the Northeast and Midwest regions in their required passage of state tests of basic skills. Districts in the Northeast region more frequently required passage of the NTE than did districts in the other three regions, while Midwest districts required passage of the NTE least often in their consideration of new hires.

Table 2. Percentage of public school districts requiring passage of selected tests when considering teacher applicants: 1990–91

	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
State Test/ Basic Skills	28.4	32.3	60.8	55.2
State Test/ Subj. Knowledge	27.3	27.7	61.0	23.3
National Teachers Examination	49.4	10.8	42.4	31.1
District Test	2.5	3.6	2.9	9.1

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1987–88 and 1990–91 Schools and Staffing Survey (Public School District Questionnaire).

Discussion

These data show that nontest indicators of teacher quality played a more important role in the teacher hiring process in public school districts in 1987–88 and in 1990–91 than did test indicators. However, while the use of nontest indicators remained fairly constant, the use of test indicators increased. The increase in the use of test indicators likely reflects the concern and attention being paid to upgrading professional standards for teachers. With the 1993–94 SASS data now available, it will be important to update these trends in the use of test and nontest criteria in considering teacher applicants.

These findings raise a number of questions that can be explored further using SASS data. For example, how many and what types of districts consider multiple criteria in the teacher hiring process, and have these districts changed the mix of criteria they use over time? Under what circumstances do districts make greater use of emergency or temporary state certification—e.g., when they are experiencing teacher shortages? The revised NTE will include major performance components requiring teachers to demonstrate teaching practice skills. How will this revision be received? Will it affect district use of the NTE? These findings also raise questions that reach beyond SASS data; for example, does the size of the available pool of prospective teachers have an effect on the mix of screening criteria used within a district? Why do districts in the South rely on tests more frequently than districts in other regions of the country? To what extent do district and state tests currently include performance-based components such as those included in the new version of the NTE? What other processes do school districts use to select new teachers (e.g., temporary or substitute teachers)?

References and Related Publications:

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Issue Briefs present information on education topics of current interest. All estimates shown are based on samples and are subject to sampling variability. All differences are statistically significant at the .05 level. In the design, conduct, and data processing of NCES surveys, efforts are made to minimize the effects of nonsampling errors, such as item nonresponse, measurement error, data processing error, or other systematic error. For additional details on SASS data collection methods and definitions, see the following U.S. Department of Education publications: *Schools and Staffing Survey: Sample Design and Estimation* (NCES Report Nos. 91–127 and 93–449) and *Quality Profile for SASS: Aspects of the Quality of Data in the Schools and Staffing Surveys (SASS)* (NCES Report No. 94–340).

This **Issue Brief** was prepared by Robert Rossi and Shannon Daugherty, American Institutes for Research. To obtain standard errors or definitions of terms for this **Issue Brief**, or to obtain additional information about the Schools and Staffing Survey, contact Charles H. Hammer (202) 219–1330. To order additional copies of this **Issue Brief** or other NCES publications, call 1–800–424–1616.

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